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## LORD RANDOLPH SPENCER CHURCHILL.

BY THE RIGHT HONORABLE SIR RICHARD TEMPLE, BART, G. C. S.I.

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I shall essay to paint a word-picture of Lord Randolph Churchill, the most extraordinary man that has appeared in the British House of Commons and in British politics during the present generation. He was the young man eloquent—the fast-rising man despite youth and inexperience. He lived, flourished, strove, contended, ruled and died (prematurely) as a young man throughout. He once spoke of Mr. Gladstone as an old man in a hurry; as we in our human weakness often attribute to others the very faults we have ourselves, so he forgot that he was himself even a young man in a hurry.

When he rose before the English political world—as the moon rises full-orbed—he was like a youth, of a slim, wiry, well-shaped stature—showing from head to foot all the marks of a high-strung nervous organization—with regular features, face shaven, except as regards the moustache, complexion slightly olive, the hair parted in the middle, the eyes large, lustrous, fiery and expressive; the voice deep, rich and sonorous; the gesture energetic, yet graceful and appropriate. He had, of course, all the advantages which in the British Parliament and politics accrue to any one who has social prestige,—and in his case all this came from an illustrious family and from historic descent.

Before 1880 he had been noticeable, perhaps, but not conspicuous in politics. That he would do something noteworthy, all could see. But what that something would be none foresaw. He might become addicted to sport, he might join the turf, he might resort to some scientific pursuit, he might undertake extensive travel—or he might be content with shining in society, which latter, however, seemed the least probable of all the possible alternatives. But after 1880 his line became marked at once and for

ever, and it was that of politics in the best British sense and in the parliamentary meaning. He would excel conclusively and decisively within the House of Commons, he would try to form and guide public opinion outside, he would control and dominate the policy of his party. Some might have doubted at first what party he would adhere to; for, though by name a Conservative, his utterances had often an advanced Liberal tendency, and some of his methods were democratic. However, he declared himself positively as a Conservative, though the most marked proof he gave of Conservatism was his violent attacking of Liberal and Radical leaders!

First he stood forth singly from the Conservative ranks, which had been smitten utterly by the General Election of 1880, and by a defeat specially disheartening after the successes they had achieved in the European settlement between Russia and Turkey. Thus standing forth from this discouraged host in 1881, like a youthful warrior armed *cap a pie* he would dare Liberal leaders to single combat. The comic papers of the day depicted him in this attitude—almost like a pigmy champion: and indited verses alluding to his mighty ancestor—"a very Malbrook in the fight, fight, fight!" Soon it was apparent that he would treat the leaders of his own party with scant respect; he was even anxious to get rid of some among them; he would take important steps, as an independent Member, without their approval or even knowledge; and then he formed a little knot or nucleus, of three Members beside himself (one of whom was Arthur Balfour, the very man who is now the famous leader of the Commons). With this handful he organized what was jocularly called "the Fourth Party." But with this little band he gave verve and spirit to the then Conservative Opposition against the Liberal Government; in fact, it became the steel head to the shaft of the spear. Soon the spirit thus infused into his brother Members was communicated to the electors outside. The Conservative leaders could hardly have liked all these doings of his, as savoring of presumption; but the party outside rather enjoyed his splendid audacity. By the beginning of 1884, he was by common fame designated for some public office or other, as the Liberal Government had become shaken by certain failures in their Egyptian policy, and as the return of the Conservatives to power was in consequence anticipated. But the most which was then thought of for him was the

Secretaryship to the Admiralty or the Under Secretaryship for War! The Liberal Government, however, lived on till 1885, when the expectation of its early decease revived, and then he showed that his ambition would not be satisfied by any subordinate office; he would leap at one bound into some post of the first rank; seniors and the like, veterans in statesmanship, might be in the way, but he must have them disposed of somehow; there must be no lions in his path! His speeches in the House of Commons had been brief, incisive, telling, well phrased, finely delivered. He now began to make speeches on platforms outside in a more oratorical manner. And all England saw that in him a new gun, of heavy calibre and long range, had been added to the Conservative armament.

When the Liberal crash came in the summer of 1885, and the first of the Salisbury Administrations was formed, he was nominated Secretary of State for India, of which strange dominion he had acquired some practical knowledge. As a youthful Minister he was the head of the Council of India, consisting of men having experience long and vast. He presided at the Council Board of veterans and graybeards with gracious humility, professing himself to be a learner. To this day, his memory is fragrant there because of his patience, aptitude and rapidity in learning. But in the House of Commons, sitting prominently on the front Ministerial Bench, he became the principal mouthpiece of the new Government—defending it at all points of attack from a powerful Opposition, not only in his own Department of State, but in almost all departments. Despite these parliamentary avocations, he found time to make the earlier of the orations for which he soon became famous. Soon the dissolution of Parliament, with a General Election, ensued, and he was the acknowledged standard bearer of the Conservative party during the autumn. In the Parliament just dissolved a new Franchise Act had been passed, greatly extending the electorate in all the rural, as distinguished from the urban, districts; and his democratic style of eloquence proved to be admirably suited to the newly enfranchised voters. It was indeed a new Conservatism which he preached, still he taught the millions both in town and country to believe in the Conservatives, whose position had been much reduced in public confidence by the campaigns of Mr. Gladstone in 1879 and 1880. We may pause for an instant to reflect on the quickness with

which he had won this pre-eminent position. Though regarded by many shrewd judges as a coming man, still up to the beginning of 1885, he was little or nothing actually and substantially in politics. Yet by the autumn of that very same year—say in about eight short months—he had grown to be a prominent Minister of the Crown, one of the leading statesmen in the House of Commons, the prime leader in an electioneering campaign extending all over England, and beyond question the first platform orator of the day next after Mr. Gladstone himself. Indeed, many thought that he was not second to anyone.

When early in 1886, the following year, the Conservative Government was defeated in the new Parliament, he resigned together with his colleagues, after having held his high office under the Crown for about eight months, but with a strong and solid reputation officially. When the Gladstonian government was formed really for the purpose of proposing Home Rule for Ireland, he played a steady part inside Parliament helping the Conservative Opposition with forceful and well-aimed speeches. He directed his main force, however, against the Home Rule project by platform speeches outside in the provinces and in the great centres. Thus in the spring of 1886 he consolidated the reputation he had won in the autumn of 1885 as a platform orator of unsurpassed effectiveness. When in the summer of that year the Home Rule Bill was defeated, and a General Election ensued, he was again hailed as the standard bearer of the Conservative party. Immediately after Lord Salisbury himself he was the second person in the Conservative party, and admittedly the first among Conservative commoners. His speeches on the electioneering platforms were so sparkling, caustic, so logical too, and so broad in scope, that it was the desire of all political men to hear them. So great would be the concourse of hearers from many quarters converging upon the meeting places, that railway companies ran special trains to convey his audiences to their destinations! He routed and cut to pieces the defeated Home Rule policy. He formulated a political creed for the Conservative party far beyond anything which had previously been deemed orthodox—and after his departure it is wonderful still to note how much of that creed survives, and how much by that short and brilliant campaign of his he influenced for all time coming the mind of the greatest of the English political parties. When in this same summer the re-

sult of the General Election was the formation of a powerful Conservative Government, he had the choice of any post he liked except the Foreign Office, which was ultimately reserved for the Prime Minister. He chose the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, the most technically difficult of all, with his usual boldness, though he had absolutely no experience of State finance; but he believed himself, and doubtless with some justice, to have intelligence enough for anything. With this great post was combined the leadership of the Commons, which thus made him second-in-command of the Government. He was raised to this not by selection, but by acclamation—as it was felt by all that he had the ear not only of the Members, but of the electors and of the country.

In the short session which followed during the early autumn, he represented the Government in the Commons, not in any overweening or demonstrative manner, but with skill, tact and quietude. This naturally strengthened the public confidence in him. His boldness and self-confidence had always been the theme of wonder, and often of admiration. Now it was seen that in the proper place he could be prudent and reserved. The Gladstonians naturally enough tried to catch him tripping in regard to the Irish policy. But he anticipated them by at once expounding his policy with fullness and explicitness.

The short session over, he went for a trip on the Continent, visiting especially Germany, Austria and parts of Russia. This was a strange thing for a young Chancellor of the Exchequer to do—an inexperienced financier. Men marvelled indeed, but they knew him to be determined to understand all that was interesting under the sun, and they felt uneasy, perhaps, as to what his pondering mind might evolve out of the mazes of European politics.

Returning to England by November, he set himself to learn his duties as Chancellor of the Exchequer! Just as in the previous year he had astonished the Anglo-Indian veterans by his humble desire to learn, so now he agreeably surprised the financial authorities at the Treasury by his rapid mastery of principles and by his readiness to enter into details. There are still men in the Treasury who remember him with pleasure and say that had he only remained in his post long enough he would have proved one of the ablest men that ever entered that difficult department.

Then he resumed for a while his political campaigning; and appeared among other places at Dartford, in Kent, the very heart

of English Conservatism. Before the most influential audience that could be assembled he made the greatest of all his political pronouncements—and it proved also to be his last. How little the multitude—who listened with eyes and ears wide open, and drank in all the high sounding sentences without thinking of what was really implied and intended—could have dreamt that he would never speak in that way again! They felt how very much they owed him, what great things he had done for them in the year about to end and in the year before; they had derived so much benefit from his teaching and preaching, they were so willing to continue accepting his guidance; his points were so attractively put to catch their attention for the moment—that they hardly perceived how he was fastening upon them as Conservatives a fairly advanced Liberal policy. Struck by his genius and eloquence, they forgot all about his youth and inexperience, and the real scantiness of his political knowledge. His speech, when calmly considered after its appearance in print, went clearly beyond what the Conservatives would ultimately accept. Still, for the moment, no objection was openly raised—his speech passed muster—men trusted that his excesses would be pared away, when the doctrines laid down oratorically came to be applied to practice, and the party remained in contentment till Christmas time in the pleasant sense of victories won and still more to follow.

There was, however, one characteristic in his speech which every one saw—indeed, none could fail to see. He spoke throughout as if he alone, in his single person, was the Government, as if there were no Prime Minister, no Cabinet, no colleagues. In a certain sense, *l'état c'est moi* was the idea pervading his speech. Not that he implied absolutism in the slightest degree—but he did imply that the administration must be conducted according to the national will, that he had a better insight than anyone else into that will, and that with this intuition, he expounded to his party, including all his colleagues, what policy would answer and what principles would have to be carried out, whether politicians liked it nor not. Indeed, he would say privately that he had “an instinct” for politics, meaning, doubtless, that he had a sort of “second sight,” almost a gift, of foretelling what the nation would require. On a retrospect of his career it is now but too easy to see that in such a country as England this procedure on the part

of the most splendid party-leader, even the greatest genius, is very much like "riding for a fall."

At Christmas tide the London "Times" astonished the world, one morning, by the announcement that he had resigned his high office. The other newspapers had no such announcement, but it was understood that at midnight he had driven over to the "Times" office and communicated the news. There was something sensational in his procedure, but then he doubtless meant to cause such a sensation as would shake the Conservative Government to its foundations and produce a political cataclysm, a parliamentary whirlpool, out of which he might emerge, and then be free to form a new government, with himself as head, an administration in which he would be supreme, and a policy of which he would be the framer. That he was aiming at supremacy in the party is believed by many; some personal admirers may have abetted him in this aim; but the mass of Conservatives were fully supporting their own Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, and his colleagues.

It soon transpired that in Cabinet Council he had, as Financial Minister, demanded some reduction in the estimates for the army and navy, that the Ministers for those two departments had objected to making any reductions in reference to the armaments on the Continent of Europe, that the Prime Minister and the rest of the Cabinet had supported them, and that, consequently, he had resigned. It was thought by many outside that his ideas had been affected by what he saw during his visit to Central and Eastern Europe. Anyhow, he had evidently tried the forbearance of his colleagues too far. No doubt they valued his services immensely, they were most anxious to keep him and not to lose him; they dreaded the disturbance that would be caused by his secession. But when he trenched on such a subject as National Defence, they rounded on him and showed that solid front which Englishmen never fail to show in critical moments. His resignation was fully and immediately accepted. In fact, he had supplied a signal illustration of the vaulting ambition which overleaps itself. c

Still, he had lighted the bomb and fired the mine—and he awaited the result. Much disturbance ensued throughout the Conservative party—telegrams by the shoal poured in upon him. He of course replied that he could do nothing, but that all remon-



stances should be addressed, not to him, but to the Government. His meaning probably was that the Government should be urged by the party to ask him to come back—doubtless he would do so, but upon his own terms—and that would amount to one more step on his road toward supremacy. But if such were his hope, it was not to be fulfilled. The Government and the party rallied after the confusion; his place as Chancellor of the Exchequer was filled by one highly qualified statesman, his position as leader of the Commons by another statesman. Some few weeks remained before the reassembling of Parliament, within which time the Government could mend the breach and prepare an unbroken front to be presented before the Opposition; and so on the date when Parliament met early in 1887, he was already a beaten and defeated man, owing to his own rashness and to his own miscalculation of political forces.

Immediately after the meeting of the House he asked leave to make his explanation. The Members crowded to hear him—as he rose, with his face, voice, figure, all associated with happy and triumphant memories, the Members began instinctively cheering almost as warmly as they had cheered him in his palmiest hours. But they grew silent as he proceeded, and he sat down at the end of his speech, amidst silence. How he must have felt the contrast between that and the tumultuous approbation that used to greet his perorations on former occasions. He had exactly confirmed all that was already understood by the public regarding the causes of his resignation, and he had concluded with what, perhaps, he meant to be the ominous words, “I appeal unto Cæsar.” That was in his peculiar manner, he would appeal to the people outside as against the Government and the Parliament. Doubtless he never thought of anything like a plebiscite; still unconsciously to himself his thoughts must have tended somewhat in that direction. His words did not prove to be ominous. The Cæsar of democracy did not listen to his appeal. The party in Parliament and in the country trusted in Lord Salisbury, the business in the Commons went on well, his absence ceased to be felt, the world took no further heed of the incidence of his resignation. He had vainly deemed himself to be the indispensable man. But in the hour of trial it was found that he could be dispensed with. As it is written in the stage directions when great actors are to quit the boards, so it was decreed of him, “*Exit.*” Yet many were very

sorry that "*sic transit gloria*" should thus be recorded of him, and that such a heyday both of actual achievement and of future promise should thus have come to an untimely close.

Whether he could by discreetly reforming his political conduct have retrieved his disaster and regained his position, may be doubtful; but many will believe that he could; and I am myself clearly of that belief, having been present in the midst of affairs. At all events he took no steps in that direction, but almost immediately proceeded to the South of Europe, as if he wished to be "out of sight and out of mind." Late in the spring he returned to the House and took his place as a private Member in the party where he had recently been the acclaimed leader. Now and again on some special occasion he moved in the House with some of his old forceful ability. Outside, too, he would occasionally make a speech with some of his old fire; but the glamour had been weakened, the spell had been broken, and there was no longer extreme curiosity to hear him, as before. He did not seem to have recuperative or rallying power; he had the *élan* to make a grand attack, but not the stubbornness to return again and again to the charge. Be that as it may, however, he certainly did not again play an active part in the Parliament which lasted till 1892. Once he stood forward to assail the Government in a style which offended the Conservative party. Once, too, he exerted his eloquence most loyally in defence of certain grants to the Royal family. On that occasion he said he had been so long absent from the House that he might almost claim the indulgence due to a new Member.

At one time some efforts were made by those Conservatives who still adhered to him absolutely, to induce him to return to some place in the Government, and apparently he was willing to do so. But whatever may have been the negotiations, they came to nothing, for he could not have been readmitted to the leadership, as the Conservatives were not sure that his temper was disciplined enough, or that he would be sufficiently tolerant toward the mediocrities who must always abound in any large body of men, to be capable of maintaining moral authority. Still, he always had a gracious manner toward those for whom he really cared.

Meanwhile, he went off on a long journey to South Africa, partly to explore for gold, partly to write graphic letters for a London newspaper. But the letters did not sustain his reputa-

tion; indeed, they had rather an unfavorable effect. His well known capacity for learning a new subject did not seem to stand him in good stead for the comprehension of South Africa.

Soon he returned to the House to find his place which he had thrown away occupied by an old friend! And alas! how changed he was! The fine, wiry figure remained, but the hair had left the head, and instead of the shaven face there was a beard; the manner, too, was less vivacious and somewhat absent. It was understood that he had felt premonition from the beginning, that he had expected a short lease of almost supreme authority and then an early death.

In 1893, however, he formally reappeared on the front Opposition bench to oppose Mr. Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill for Ireland. A hope had spread abroad that he was himself again, and once more the Members crowded to hear him, and the galleries were full. The oration was indeed very fine, but the world saw that he was no longer his old self. On subsequent occasions he rose to speak, but each time it became more apparent that some fatal change was supervening, and that he was succumbing to nervous depression. It were too sad to record the almost daily decay of his once beaming personality during 1894. He made gallant, almost desperate, efforts to recover himself, but these only hastened the end. During the autumn and early winter he journeyed to the sunny South of Europe, and in the beginning of 1895 was carried back to London, almost motionless, to die. Then for some days all England, in imagination, stood by the side of his death-bed. As the end came, quite quietly, all British politicians, friends and foes alike, were sorrowing. The Conservatives grieved over the untimely loss of one of the brightest ornaments that ever adorned their historic party. All men acknowledged that never had the force of youthful genius—striking, piercing, penetrating—been so displayed in British politics, except in the example of William Pitt the younger.

RICHARD TEMPLE.